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Written Testimony submitted by
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On behalf of the membership of Conn-NAHRO*

Conn-NAHRO is the Connecticut chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials; its membership is comprised of Public Housing Authorities and other individuals and organizations involved in affordable housing.

Co-Chairmen Coleman, Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jeffrey Arn, I am the current, Vice President of Housing and Legislation for Conn-NAHRO, I am the Executive Director of the Vernon Housing Authority and I also serve as a Commissioner for the Coventry Housing Authority. **I am writing on behalf of CONN-NAHRO in opposition of Raised Senate Bill No. 453, "AN ACT CONCERNING CERTIFICATES OF RELIEF FROM BARRIERS RESULTING FROM CONVICTION OF A CRIME".**

As proposed this bill would create several areas of great concern for public housing authorities in the state of Connecticut. First and foremost this will create a conflict with federal housing regulations which most housing authorities must follow. The proposed amendment to Section 5 states that Public Housing Authorities "shall give consideration to a Certificate of Relief from Barriers issued under section 54-130e, as amended by this act, and such certificate shall be deemed to demonstrate presumed eligibility that the applicant or occupant, as the case may be, is suitable for such housing, except as provided by federal law."

Public Housing Authorities must prohibit admission for certain types of criminal offenses. 24 CFR 960.204; 24 CFR Part 5, subpart L. Moreover, federal law requires PHAs to screen family behavior and suitability for tenancy 24 CFR 960.203. The regulations grant to Public Housing Authorities the discretion in deciding what tenant selection criteria to establish, within certain federal parameters. This fact alone should be enough to reject this proposed bill and should be given extensive consideration when deciding its outcome.

However, in addition to the obvious conflict with federal regulation this bill could have a devastating effect on our public housing for other reasons. The Bill appears to grant the superior court and Board of Pardons and Paroles the power to insert convicted criminals into public housing regardless of their prior convictions and the housing authorities screening policies. Considering the most recent study on recidivism conducted by the Connecticut Department of Correction this could put the inherently vulnerable residents of Public Housing at risk. The study followed 14,398 male sentenced offenders after they were released or discharged from a prison facility in 2005, providing a five year review of recidivism. The study

found that within five years of their release; 79 percent were re-arrested, 69 percent were convicted of a new crime, and 50 percent were returned to prison with a new sentence. The study also found that; 50 percent of the offender group had served at least one sentence for violating the terms of their probation, 46 percent had served time in prison for a drug charge and 19 percent had served a prior sentence for driving under the influence or alcohol or drugs.

By putting convicted criminals into public housing knowing that such high rates of recidivism are expected this will put our elderly and disabled residents at great risk by exposing them to this anticipated criminal activity. In addition, our low and moderate income family developments have historically struggled with crime issues. Adding an additional criminal element to the mixture could destine these properties for failure.

Although this bill is being proposed with good intentions the need as it pertains to public housing is not needed. There are already safeguards in place that allow due process for convicted criminals. All applicants that are denied public housing are afforded an opportunity for a hearing in which all extenuating circumstances can be considered. There are also guidelines that only allow criminal convictions to be considered for a set amount of time thus allowing for a rehabilitated criminal that has stayed out of trouble to live in public housing.

We are hopeful that you will consider all of the aforementioned items when considering the outcome of this bill. I believe it is obvious that given these facts there is no reason to include Public Housing as part of this bill as it will only serve to put our valued residents at risk unnecessarily.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.